



BROWSE

 **Wild Mustangs by Parley J. Paskett (review)**

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Western American Literature

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REVIEW

[View Citation](#)**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

260 Western American Literature slain, so much action and I know amidst this frenzy there are these eclipses when the sun goes black and the temperature drops, these little deaths of the blazing white light. And I do not want these moments to go unnoticed. Close to the roar, Bowden records (in one perfect glimpse of the capture of a rare desert antelope) the violation that goes with our compulsion to know and touch remnant wildness. He records the disappearance and persistence of people and cultures: Hispanic clans overrun by Tucson suburbia and local color, Papagos reviewing the ambiguous enticements of the real estate world, Ajo miners playing out the last rhythms of company life, lonesome personal histories surfacing in the momentary drama of crime. Over it all, the wash of boosterism and dream sensation; beneath it the accelerating death of species, with an occasional at least symbolic victory by Nature Conservancy or Earth First! The finest essays in Blue Desert may be the first and last. The opener is about bats, the "demons of our dreams" we have all but unconsciously subjected to a "slow chemical death." In the final chapter, Bowden follows the trail of illegal immigrants across more than forty miles of lethal dryness in the Cabeza Prieta and

finds, as well as a writer can for a reader, “the only ground where I truly trust my senses.” As always with this kind of book, one may quibble with some of the ways in which personality enters the writing, but any flaws in that direction are inseparable from the honesty and courage of the imaginative task, and are part of the truth. *Blue Desert* is a work of excellence, and, just as an extra, one should mention that it is haunted by lions. *DONN RAWLINGS Yavapai College Wild Mustangs*. By Parley J. Paskett. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1986. 121 pages, \$9.95.) In recent decades, much national interest has been focused on preserving the wild mustang herds in the desert regions of Nevada. Long before this ecological purpose arose, popular writers such as Zane Grey and J. Frank Dobie produced poetic narratives, based upon regional folklore, which popularized the mustang as a romantic freedom symbol. In strong contrast to these writers, with their sentimentalizing of the mustang, Parley J. Paskett, in this gathering of autobiographical sketches, presents first-hand recollections of wild-horse wrangling in Nevada. Paskett’s earthy prose echoes the pragmatic Reviews 261 spirit of Pete Barnum, Rufus Steele, and Will Barnes, who realistically reported their mustanging experiences during the early decades of this century and commonly valued the mustang only for its potential as a working saddle horse. Like them, Paskett is concerned with the day-to-day experiences of mustanging, a profession he followed for several years. Paskett’s matter-of-fact purpose, to portray the life of the mustanger as he actually lived it, is the source of this book’s strengths and limitations. Like other profit-minded mustangers, Paskett defines professional success in terms of total mustangs corralled per expedition. Paskett’s practical emphasis is exemplified by his speculation in “Mustangs on the Range” on the possibility of rounding up two hundred or more mustangs in one triumphant drive. In contrast to idealized western legend, which features macho mustangers selectively pursuing a single defiant stallion leader and ignoring the many mares and yearlings, Paskett’s narratives focus on the businesslike trapping of the entire herd. For Paskett, quantity is all important; quality an insignificant matter. Nor does Paskett’s tale-telling respect the romantic convention of the stallion’s heroic nobility. He refuses to spare his stallion protagonists from moments of indignity as he uses the most pragmatic means available of taking away their freedom. The best example of his practical approach to mustanging is contained in the tale “The Love Trap,” where Paskett describes capturing an especially elusive mustang stallion by playing upon his amorous weaknesses. He cleverly uses his own saddle mare to arouse the stallion’s ardor and then ropes him during the subsequent encounter. Dobie, for one, would never have related such a humiliating incident. Although the lay reader may be disappointed...

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As always with this kind of book, one may quibble with some of the ways in which personality enters the writing, but any flaws in that direction are inseparable from the honesty and courage of the imaginative task, and are part of the truth. *Blue Desert* is a work of excellence, and, just as an extra, one should mention that it is haunted by lions.

DONN RAWLINGS

*Yavapai College*

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